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A MOTHER'S INFLUENCE.

BY AGATHA M. GOODHART.

THE keystone of a Mother's Influence is sympathy. Absolute, complete, comprehensive, feeling with her children, and letting them know that she feels with them in all their joys and sorrows. Every mother who is at all worthy the name will endeavour to sympathize in any great sorrow which may fall to the children's lot to bear; but her capability of understanding their feelings will be greatly lessened if she has not from their earliest babyhood sympathized with all the trivial nothings which interested them. Mothers seem to find it more difficult to enter into the little pleasures than to understand the little woes. For one thing, perhaps, the woes are so much more aggressive. A loud roar cannot be mistaken; there is something wrong certainly, and the anxious mother rushes to console. This particular sympathy is really not so necessary; the roar has been a certain consolation, and at any rate the sympathy really required on such an occasion should be of a bracing tonic nature. The old-fashioned adage, "Give him something to cry for," might with advantage be changed to "Give him something to laugh at!" A bright little story of a funny kitten that stood on its head will banish the tears and cause the bumped knee to heal with marvellous rapidity. It is just the sympathetic understanding of the trouble which will enable the mother to give the child the little friendly help which may clear it all away.

A bright young mother took her boy of two and a half to a children's party. She had left him for a few minutes with the others. When she returned she found the children had begun to pull crackers; a sudden panic at the loud noise had assailed the little fellow; he was flushed and tears were in his eyes; he caught sight of his mother. A word of doleful sympathy, such as, "Poor Harry, are you frightened?" would have been fatal: instead, the clever mother laughed

brightly, saying gaily, "Well, Harry, isn't it jolly?" The panic was over, the fear conquered, and besides, perhaps, he felt dimly in his baby mind he must live up to his mother's ideal, so back came the cheery reply, "Yes, mother, jolly!" and in a few moments he was gaily pulling crackers with the rest.

Children naturally claim a great deal of sympathy. They claim it from the mother first of all, but if she will not listen to them and does not care to be bothered with them, they try elsewhere, or, perhaps, become very reserved. Later on the mother begins to complain, "My children are so reserved, they never tell me anything." This is said in quite an aggrieved tone, and she will go on to envy her friend's good fortune in having such frank, open children, telling their mother everything so sweetly, she, poor woman, never realizing that she has only herself to blame for the cloak of reserve in which she has wrapped her little ones. While they were tiny they imperatively demanded her confidence; they wanted her to share their every thought, they gave her their confidence freely. But this priceless confidence is easily lost. If a mother does not exert herself to understand the baby fancies, and encourage the child to explain it all, he soon begins to see that his little affairs are beneath her notice. The mother probably calmly acquiesces in this; she really cannot be troubled with all baby's little fancies and his tiresome questions. So poor baby's confidence is repulsed; the little flower that was opening so gaily, and should have been nourished by a mother's sunny love, has to shrivel up again; the first blight of cruel frost has touched it, that cruel frost of the world's indifference, which will chill enthusiasms again and again; but think of it, young mothers, that *first* chill has been given by a mother's carelessness.

A very few rebuffs will shake your child's confidence in what he at first hoped for, a never-failing interest in all that interests him. Some bright sunny morning he comes rushing to mother, full of joy and wanting to tell her all sorts of trivial gay nothings; but the mother is busy, occupied of doubtless with important matters, perhaps a new and fashionable costume, at all events, something more important than one poor little wounded heart. "Go away, child, I can't be bothered with you"; or perhaps more kindly, "Go away,

dear, I have no time for you." Poor little chap, he goes away sadly; "Mother does not care," so all the happiness is blurred and saddened.

It is not the least necessary, or even desirable, that children should be allowed to interrupt their elders on all occasions when they wish to intrude their little matters of interest. It is only the cruel, careless, but so common, lack of sympathy which kills their confidence. A brilliant flower has been found, a dandelion perhaps, the mother has friends calling, or is writing important letters; in rushes the child to show his treasure, a word of genuine admiration, a promise—which must be redeemed—to tell him all about it by-and-by, an exhortation to find some still more lovely flower, and he is out again in a moment. This is sympathetic treatment, and it is surely as easy and much pleasanter than, "Oh! take away that ugly weed, and you really must not come bothering just now, go to the nursery!" Possibly this is followed by a roar, and certainly by an angry, hurt feeling on the poor child's part.

Sometimes there may be excuse, but certainly never justification. If a mother is very tired and has a splitting headache and is lying down for a few minutes' rest, when suddenly a merry troop bang at the door, it is perhaps excusable to send them away; and it costs an effort, certainly, to jump off the sofa, unlock the door, and listen with a smiling face to lively tales and hear of all the wonderful things that have happened, trivial in themselves, but sure to interest "mother"; but the effort is well worth making, and the children can be taught sympathy in their turn. "And now, darlings, be off with you; I have so liked hearing about everything, but I have such a cracking headache you must leave me quite quiet now." "Oh, poor mother, and yet you let us come in; how good of you." And with such tender, loving kisses, that almost drive the pain away, the children creep quietly out, only, perhaps, a violent whisper from an elder brother to a younger one, who has laboriously tumbled over a foot-stool, "Don't make such a beastly row, can't you see how ill mother is?" A golden link in the chain of sympathy is actually forged where, but for the little effort, it might have been weakened, if not broken. The children might have been sent away by a querulous voice, and the door not even unlocked.

Let this be done several times, and the mother who does it once will probably do it often, and gradually it is borne in upon the children that their little confidences are not appreciated. Poor little souls, they do not wish to "cast their pearls before swine." "Mother is very kind, but she does not understand." The gulf widens day by day and year by year. The time comes when the mother would give the world for her children's confidence, but it is gone; they have lost the habit of telling her every little thing, it has been killed by her culpable, careless neglect, and now, when it is of vital importance to them and to her that they should have the benefit of her experience, they do not ask her advice or care to confide in her.

It is rarely the busy woman, the woman who is really doing actual work in the world, who has not time to give her heart and mind to her children's confidences; it is generally the weak silly woman, who fritters away her time in needless worries, and, poor thing, truly believes she has not a moment to spare. In *The Woman at Home*, of June, 1897, there is a delightful description of Mrs. Gaskell at work. "Her daughters recall to-day that as children they went in and out to her freely when she was writing, and were never reprovved for disturbing her. She would stay her pen, lift her eyes from the manuscript, and enter into their nursery troubles or schoolroom difficulties, with that beautiful motherly sympathy which they love to recall, and having satisfied them, resume the story in hand quite undisturbed, no spell broken or thoughts gone straying apparently."

Then again, in that charming book, *The Children*, by Mrs. Meynell, we can surely read between the lines how welcome her little ones were always, and feel sure they never left her presence suffering from that terrible heart-hunger, hard for a grown-up person, but much harder for a child who cannot even put his thoughts into shape, but only knows "mother's busy, and nobody wants me anywhere."

Some persons have the sympathetic instinct in a much more intense degree than others, and there is no doubt that it is to a certain extent an intellectual gift, but love is a wonderful teacher, and the great secret is to have "clean dropped thinking about yourself." That smooths difficulties away wonderfully; there is so much more time for thinking about

and planning for others when that tiresome and intrusive *ego* has been dismissed.

The unselfishness of mothers is supposed to be very beautiful, so possibly it is, when it exists; but if it were as universal as one is led to imagine, we should hear less of rebellious daughters and troublesome sons and the ingratitude of children. The daughters seem to be even more difficult to deal with than the sons, and for that reason surely they want even greater and more constant sympathy. How very frequently do we hear it said that so-and-so and her mother do not get on, and how very rare is that perfect confidence between a girl and her mother that includes so much and makes the relation such a happy one. A young girl can have no such adviser as her mother, and many unhappy marriages might be prevented were the mother her girl's confidante in every real or imaginary love affair. Marriage, and all that it involves, including the probability of children, is a very serious matter, and yet young women rush into it utterly ignorant, and knowing almost nothing of the man they are taking for their life's companion. I can almost hear the mothers expostulating and saying, "But our daughters will not listen to us, they are such advanced women they think our opinion worth nothing; they think themselves so much cleverer and more learned than we are." It is just possible that the last statement is rather true. We mothers of the present day had not the same advantages in our youth that girls have now. But a woman who has kept her mind at work, has never let it lie fallow, has read and thought, will not find herself so very far behind her daughters, and of course her outlook is larger and her experience far greater. The lack of a few extra items of knowledge will not prevent her daughters confiding in her; but the utter lack of sympathy shown all through the girls' growing years will check all confidence. The girls may long to talk freely to their mother, but they simply cannot. They have never been used to discussing every trivial little interest with their mother, and now that they have important subjects to discuss, it seems still more difficult. Everything is difficult if it is begun at the wrong end. Begin with your babies, and all will go well. It seems, perhaps, absurd to make so much depend on whether you listen to a baby's chatter or not, but I believe

many of this world's sad failures would have been successes if only they had had a mother's loving sympathy all through their infancy and youth.

Sympathy and love are almost identical, though there may be love without sympathy, but it's a poor selfish sort of love; yet there can never be sympathy without deep, unselfish, intelligent love. I have made no mention of a mother's authority, or any other way in which her influence may be shown, because sympathy includes all. Train the child to implicit obedience is preached. He will naturally give that obedience at first, but soon the love which exists between mother and child lessens the necessity for that implicit, unreasoning obedience. The mother wishes to be a comrade, not a ruler; she and her child get the same ideals, and work for the same ends. She cannot be a ruler always; there comes a time when all rule, especially weak woman's rule, is defied, but there never comes a time when love is defied. If a mother is a comrade to her boy at twelve, will she not still be his comrade at twenty? If, on the other hand, he has been subdued and kept under rigid surveillance until that age, and then suddenly all restraint is removed, as it must when he goes out into the world alone, heaven help him, poor fellow; he will plunge deeper and deeper into folly and sin, keeping all secret from the mother who loves him and would give her life to help him, but he has learned by bitter childish experience that "mother" is not interested in his affairs.

It may be asked, "Is it possible to keep up close sympathy between mother and sons, if the boys go to a Public School and are away from home the greater part of the year?" On the surface it seems almost better to educate them at home; but it does not answer. A home education makes a boy a prig or a recluse, with an utter lack of *savoir faire*, and an indefinite want of manners; or, worse still, he becomes a complete society man, and has sucked the orange of existence dry before he is twenty. There are dangers in Public School life certainly, but a necessary loss of touch with home is not one of them, and that touch with home if never allowed to drop will keep the boy safe. The mother should, if possible, see him often, and have long talks with him, knowing in this way everything that goes on in the school.

They say a "little learning is a dangerous thing," but for mothers it is invaluable. A great deal of learning would, doubtless, be better, but time will generally only permit a smattering to be acquired. A little Algebra, Euclid, Latin, Greek, Electricity, all come in conveniently when discussing the different work, and what a pleasure to an intelligent boy to explain to his mother some point which she does not quite understand. Then what an intense pleasure to the mother when on a country walk her big boy tells her all sorts of interesting facts about every plant, animal, tree, formation of soil, etc.; and she looks back through the long years and thinks of the time when she, desperately ignorant and unobservant herself, tried to enter into the boy's gropings after knowledge, and seeing he was interested in nature, as every child is until it has been flattened out of him, listened to his questions, answered them as well as she could, and in her leisure time studied the subjects, so that the little fellow should not come to her for information and fail to get it.

Many people think that children are too much considered and too much indulged. This certainly is sometimes the case; but as Mrs. Wiggin so truly says in her little book, *Children's Rights*, "A multitude of privileges, or rather indulgences, can exist with a total disregard of the child's rights." Now this maternal sympathy is clearly one of the child's rights, and any woman who has brought a child into the world and is not prepared to give this sympathy, which everyone must grant he naturally and imperatively demands, is defrauding her child. No woman need fear the effort or exertion, the concentration of ideas, and the necessary giving up of other interests. Any little sacrifice she may make will be most amply rewarded, not in some far distant future time, but now, at once, hourly and daily, in the atmosphere of love and devotion with which her children will constantly enfold her.

CHILDREN'S HYMNS.

COMMUNICATED BY MRS. PAREZ.

HYMNS have always proved valuable auxiliaries in teaching young children the first ideas of God and of religion. Next to the Bible itself they have done most to influence our views and mould our theology. Easily learned in the days of childhood and youth, often repeated, seldom if ever forgotten, they become engrafted in the heart, and form a fitting expression for every kind of religious feeling. They also form a bond between Christians of all denominations. The hymns of Watts, Keble, Newman are a common possession and dear alike to the heart of Churchman and Nonconformist.

It is perhaps somewhat remarkable that the earliest Christian hymn in metre, which we possess, is a hymn for children. It is entitled, "A Hymn to Christ, the Saviour," and was written in Greek about 150 years after the death of our Lord. Its author was the great theologian Clement, of the famous city of Alexandria. This is worthy of note, as showing the importance which the earliest Christians attached to the religious teaching of the young.

Let me cite another instance. The first Latin hymn to which we can give the name of its author was written in the year 358, by Hilary, Bishop of Poitiers, in France, a place so well known to English history. It is a morning hymn,—

"Lucis Largitor splendide"
("O bounteous Giver of the light"),

—and it was sent when Hilary was in exile, together with an evening hymn, in a letter to his little daughter Abia. She was only twelve years of age; and he tells her if she finds any difficulties in his letter or in the hymns, she would do best to consult her mother. Not bad advice, although it be 1500 years old. But I am not going to take you all down the ages: I will come to what we may call modern times.

In speaking of children's hymns, we must not pass by the famous Martin Luther. The bold, rough, pugnacious theologian had a very tender heart for children. His own children he taught to pray, and to sing hymns, and to repeat the catechism. In one of his letters he tells how his little